

vendors may easily and cheaply set up stores, since no real world physical fixtures and extensively repetitive stock of inventory is required. Only a master copy of an asset need be stored in the inventory, not multiple copies of such (and a vendor will never run out of copies). The financial intermediaries can centralize and operate using widely available communications mediums, rather than having to operate extensive distributed service outlets. And, ultimately, via market competition, some portion of the reductions in operating costs caused by the above will be passed on to the end users, the consumers.

And, another advantage of the invention is that it may include varying levels and strengths of protection for intellectual property rights embodied in the assets, to provide confidence to the suppliers of the assets.

These and other objects and advantages of the present invention will become clear to those skilled in the art in view of the description of the best presently known mode of carrying out the invention and the industrial applicability of the preferred embodiment as described herein and as illustrated in the several figures of the drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The purposes and advantages of the present invention will be apparent from the following detailed description in conjunction with the appended drawings in which:

FIGS. 1a-b are basic stylized depictions of how the invention may reside in a users personal computer;

FIGS. 2a-b are basic stylized depictions of the business model used by the invention;

FIG. 3 is a detailed block diagram of a suitable architecture for the invention;

FIG. 4 is a block diagram depicting a functional overview of the invention;

FIG. 5 is a block diagram depicting a navigational overview of portions of the invention which reside in a client computer system;

FIG. 6 is a depiction of a top view, or "village" view, presented by a graphical user interface (GUI) suitable for use on the client computer system;

FIG. 7 shows a store GUI view, accessible via the GUI in FIG. 6;

FIG. 8 shows an asset GUI view, accessible via the store view in FIG. 7;

FIG. 9 shows a purchase summary and confirmation GUI view, i.e., a "check-out" view, accessible via either the store view in FIG. 7 or the asset view in FIG. 8;

FIGS. 10a-f show a search GUI views accessible via the GUI views in FIG. 6-8, where FIG. 10a depicts an asset name based search, FIG. 10b depicts a provider name based

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